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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Pascal Ricard
Erik Hall

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~ Net Tax Talks Renewed! ~ People Are Talking! ~ MyMail Updated!
~ Sonic’s 10th Year! ~ eBay Feedback Modified ~ Mac OS X Upgraded!
~ Midway To End Coin-Ops ~ Net Tax Debate Renewed ~ New AtarICQ Version!
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-* New Microsoft Antitrust Case *-
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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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What a hodgepodge of weather this week! Sun, torrential rain, cool, humid, and everything in-between. Overall, a nice week! The yard is coming along nicely. The gardens are thriving. The pool is uncovered and filtering clean (but not ready for swimming just yet). It should be a pretty good weekend to get some more stuff done, with time to enjoy it, as well.

It’s been another fairly quiet week, as is the norm during these summer days (yes, it’s summer!!). Everything slows down on the news front at this time of year for some reason. I’m not sure why as work life goes on all year long, regardless of the seasons. Maybe it’s because people focus more on enjoying this time of year than others. Who knows! Personally, I tend to spend more time doing "other" things rather than dwelling on the work-related part of my life. For example, I’m going to get this issue out as quickly as possible in order that I can enjoy the last couple of hours of a nice summer evening!

Until next time...

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New AtarICQ version

The most beautiful instant messaging programme existing for the Atari platform is now available in a new version. It is now available in 6 languages and works with STiK 2, STinG, MiNTnet/MagiCnet with the corresponding GlueSTiK version! It works with N.AES as well as with MagiC and is also compatible with XaAES!

Besides the registration directly to the authors, it’s also possible to get your key via Europe Shareware for only 21.50 Euros.

http://www.europe-shareware.org/atari/logiciels/ataricq.html (French)

Best regards,

P. Ricard (ES)
--
Europe Shareware http://www.europe-shareware.org

New MyMAIL Version Out Now

Erik Hall

Hi all !

New version of MyMail (1.40) at my homepage.

http://www2.tripnet.se/~erikhall/programs/mymail.html

Some of the changes, bug fixes and so on:

- The code for outgoing mail queue is totally redesigned.

  mapS by Gerald Dietze is updated and synced to changes.
  update can be found at:

  http://gerald-dietze.de/dsi.html

  The new mapS will also run with older Versions
  because it's checking the program version.

- Added CPS in progress bar for mail download.
  Estimated total download time and time left is also presented.
- Replaced all the old popup menu code with the new one.
- A missing check of error message added and this solves problems
  with some mail servers (smail).
- Fixed a bad and old bug that was causing mymail to crash if there
  was very long To: fields in a incoming mail.

  This is only a minor part of the changes, bug fixes and so on.
  Please do read the history file that is more complete.

Please read the history and docs regarding
bug fixes and new functions or changes.

You can add or remove yourself from MyMAIL mailing list.
The add/remove page is found at:
http://www2.tripnet.se/~erikhall/mymailupdates.html
The mailing list are handled by MyMAIL automatically.

If you find any problems with MyMAIL please let me know.

Thanks to all of you for all the help I get from you all.

Best Regards
Erik Hall

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, we've hit the longest day of the year. Whoopie! <grin>

Now the fun begins. The days at the beach, the picnics, the warm evenings, the pool parties, and whatever else you usually do during the summer. Some misguided publisher types spend way too much time on yard work, and need to spend more time getting their pool ready. <ducking the pie now being hurled at me>.

Summer is more than a season for recreation. Heck, you can find recreational activities for any season. Summer is a time of growth. A time when everything that lives is in a state of growth. It's hard sometimes to see what's growing all around you, but if you take a close look and actually observe, you'll realize that everything observes the cycle of the seasons. It's only when a living thing becomes "intelligent" that the natural order is broken.

Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Who knows. It's simply the way it is. Sometimes growth isn't the only thing we find hard to recognize. Take, for instance, the environmental problems seen in every industrialized country in the world. Those who benefit most from industrialization tell us ad nauseum that the effects are minimal, and that we'll never even notice. There's a chance that they're right, but others speak just as loudly that nature herself can't undo what we're doing in short order.

My favorite phrase to make fun of is "Save the Planet". I've got news for you, folks. Mother Earth will remain here, and in good condition no matter what we do to her. Even a "nuclear winter" would pass almost almost unnoticed by our home planet. In her timeframe, it would be little more than a blink of an eye. It is US that would suffer should it turn out that we're causing damage. The Earth will continue subducting continental plates, recycling things and making the old new again. Should we succeed in turning earth into a place that will no longer support us she will, in time, turn things around and allow others to live off of her bounty.

What does any of this have to do with computers in general, and Atari computers specifically? Nothing. I just think that sometimes we suffer from tunnel-vision and need to realize that there are other concerns out there. The "Save the Planet" thing is something that gets attention because we ALL share the object of the discussion. There's no way to figure that it's someone else's problem. In this scenario, what happens to one happens to all. Short of an extraterrestrial invasion (ala Ronald Reagan's "what if" speech), turning our planet uninhabitable is the worst thing that could happen to us.

Well, that's enough of that. Let's get to the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

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Alex Stepney asks about configuring HD Driver:

"I recently had to do a re-install of everything on my Falcon. I'm now experiencing some problems with HDDriver. When I boot off floppy I can see all my SCSI devices fine, if I try to boot off disk I can only see the internal IDE drive even when I boot off an external SCSI device!!! I've also recently reset the NVRAM, is there a setting in here thats causing this behaviour?"

The author of HD Driver, Dr. Uwe Seimet, tells Alex:

"Yes, there is. Please check the device configuration of HDDRIVER.SYS, as explained in the manual. Most likely you forgot to activate some of your devices."

Peter West jumps in and adds:

"[It] Might be even better if he used 'Auto Configuring' in HDDRUTIL, as this should activate all connected drives."

Alex re-boots and tells Uwe and Peter:

"Next time I booted up it all seems fine.... Hmmmmm strange. Its working now and thats the main thing."

Tim Conrardy posts:

"Petra Wolf and Joker finally decided to release MidiGen, an Algorithmic Midi Generator with some very cool graphics as well.There is no Manual ..YET...but he is planning on it for sometime in the near Future. In the meantime, this description (below)is ALL THERE IS! But by clicking on things, you can figure things out.

Go here:

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/atari-midi/files/Jokermidi/

Look for MidiGen.zip

Sometime soon, I will be adding it to the KLANG PIRATEN page on TAMW where there are other Petra Wolf and Joker Atari-Midi apps made available. (Zues and Prophy)But in the meantime: check out this very unique app. You won't find it on any other platform but ATARI! (YEAH!!)...

Well...I created the page:
Go here:

http://sites.netscape.net/timconrardy/joker.htm

For a look at MidiGen! I have Screen shots..very cool app!"

Maarten Martens posts about his new website:

"I just wanted to let you know I've created a new Atari fan page..."The Atari Graveyard"...I've written 2 reviews for ST Games...If you feel like reading some...go check it out and let me know what you think."

Like the seers of old, 'Oracle' tells Maarten:

"a URL would be handy"

Maarten pops back in and posts:

"Sorry,
www.geocities.com/stgraveyard "

My first impulse on reading this exchange was to chuckle. But to be honest, I've done the same thing... ummm, let's just say 'more than once' and leave it at that. jm

Tony Cianfaglione asks about his 520:

"Two questions re: the 520ST and disk drives:

1. Can the internal single-sided drive simply be replaced with a double-sided drive and the 520 treat it as such or will the 520 treat it as a single-sided drive and need some internal revisions prior to seeing it as a double-sided drive?

2. Can a 520 (single-sided internal drive) use an external double-sided drive as a double-sided drive or will it treat it as a single-sided drive regardless of it being a double-sided drive?

Sorry if this seems like double talk (or is that single talk?)"

Branko Dadrljica tells Tony:

"It will work with double sided drive without changes, except some plastic cutting to accommodate different eject knob position and shape and different disk hole height. I usually use PC's floppy in ST with excellent results.

If you are about to use PC's floppy, jumper it to work as drive 0 (not drive 1 as default)."

Steve Stupple adds:

"Yes you can just change the 360k drive for a 720k, you may have to make some modification to the upper casing as the eject button usually is different, unless you get one from another ST.

It will be treated as a double sided drive and not a single, and you can read disk that are both singles and double sided.

You can upgrade to a 1.44 floppy, but some soldering may be needed and a small software patch as well.

You can use an external drive with no problems. These can be 5.25", single sided 3.5" (360) or a double sided 3.5" (720k).

As long as the external drive if for an Atari ST, you should be ok."

Bob Friend reminisces about one of my favorite programs:

"Some years ago I used to run Calligrapher Word processor on my ST - in fact I fired it up the other day for nostalgic reasons, it was a pretty

neat program. One thing I did like was the IDEAS module - this was a sort of tree-diagram thing geared up for planning and organising ideas.... Does anyone know of a similar PC program that exists today, ideally shareware????"

Ken Springer tells Bob:

"I don't know of a specific program, but you might check out tucows.com and zdnet.com. Both have good freeware and shareware downloads."

Larry Anderson asks for help with a SyQuest 44:

"I recently obtained a SyQuest 44 drive with an ICD host adapter... and my fading memory is causing me problems with getting this thing running.

Right now, I'm using AHDI, and it can see the drive... however, I'm not sure what drive letter to assign to the drive (I already have a 40 meg drive with C-F partitions, assigning G didn't work), and if there are any additional steps necessary to get this thing working (drivers, config files, etc)."

Uwe Seimet tells Larry:

"The drives letters are usually assigned in ascending order by the hard disk driver. The user cannot influence this, at least not with AHDI. With other drivers, in particular HDDRIVER, the user can assign any driver letter (even A: or B:) to a partition on a hard disk drive."

Lonny Pursell tells Larry that it...

"Should be plug&play, boot the machine and it should appear as 'g' on it's own. AHDI will stop scanning the scsi bus at the first ID that times out. Make sure you have a disk in the drive as I don't think AHDI will see it correctly otherwise.
If you are gonna use the machine for any serious work it's worth investing in HD Driver. It's a lot more flexible, can skip ID's and even allows you to boot with an empty drive."

Ken Ramlall asks about using DiskCopy images:

"Can someone point me in the right direction (doc, etc.), or just explain how to use diskcopy images with the Atari Emulator NoSTalgia? Essentially, I have a sample editor program for the Atari and all I have is a mac. I've downloaded the editor and extracted the files (.prg, etc.) but I'm not sure how to get the emulator to mount (?) the diskcopy image to then launch the editor."

Philippe Gorin tells Ken:

"DiskCopy is used to mount the hard disk images. The files HDD-C & HDD-D are compatibles with DiskCopy (20Mb DOS format).

Just create a ST HD partition. Be sure that NoSTalgia can use it. Then quit the emulator and drag&drop the hard disk image onto DiskCopy.

You can now copy your program your files/programs on the hard disk image.

Un-mount the diskimage and re-launch NoSTalgia.

You can do the same with 720k DOS disk images, both compatibles with DiskCopy and NoSTalgia

NoSTalgia & PowerST AtariST emulator for the Macintosh

<http://users.skynet.be/sky39147/> <http://nostalgia.atari.org>

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Sonic Adventure 2'! 'NBA Street'!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" 'Twisted Metal: Black'! 'Tang Tang'!
Midway: No More Arcade Games!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Sega Celebrates Ten Years of Sonic With the
Worldwide Launch of Sonic Adventure 2 Exclusively
for Dreamcast

''Sonic Adventure 2" Speeds onto Dreamcasts
Everywhere with New Two-Player Split-Screen Mode

In celebration of the 10th anniversary of Sega's world-famous mascot, Sonic the Hedgehog, Sega of America today announced the worldwide release of ''Sonic Adventure 2" exclusively for the 128-bit, Internet-ready Sega Dreamcast video game console. This high-speed thrill ride sets Sonic, one of the fastest and most recognizable video game characters of all time, loose in a whirlwind 3D adventure based on the top-selling original ''Sonic Adventure" for Dreamcast.

Created by acclaimed game developer Yuji Naka, ''Sonic Adventure 2" takes players on a fast action mission with Sonic and familiar friends, Knuckles and Tails, to foil the plans of the evil Dr. Robotnik (a.k.a. Eggman) and two mysterious dark characters, Shadow and Rouge. Now players can go head-to-head in two-player split-screen mode with one of six playable characters from either the ''Hero Side" or ''Dark Side."

‘‘Since the 1991 release of ’Sonic the Hedgehog,’ Sonic has been a leading icon in the video game industry and a consistent top-seller for Sega," said Charles Bellfield, vice president of corporate and marketing communications, Sega of America. ‘‘With the global release of ’Sonic Adventure 2,’ Sega is celebrating the 10-year heritage of the Sonic franchise and delivering the best Sonic game yet."

In ‘‘Sonic Adventure 2," players blaze through more than 30 fast action stages including hilly city streets, dark freeways, challenging army fortresses, ancient ruins, and outer space. Players test their skills with all new moves as they rail-grind their way through a San Francisco-inspired stage or outrun an 18-wheeler barreling down residential streets. There are also a plethora of Chao minigames available in ‘‘Sonic Adventure 2."

‘‘Sonic Adventure 2" is rated ‘‘E" for ‘‘Everyone" and is now available at retail stores nationwide or at www.sega.com for $39.95.

Twisted Metal: Black Brings Hell-Raising Car Combat to the PlayStation2

Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. announced today the release of Twisted Metal:Black exclusively for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system. Based on the successful Twisted Metal franchise, Twisted Metal: Black brings a whole new look and feel to the series, catapulting players into a deeper and darker gameplay environment than ever before. Designed by Sony Computer Entertainment America, Santa Monica and developed by Incog Inc. Entertainment, Twisted Metal:Black utilizes the technological prowess of the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system to bring the team’s shocking and imaginative vision to life through superior graphics and outstanding special effects.

Twisted Metal:Black is designed and developed by the creators of Twisted Metal 1 and 2. When the original Twisted Metal game was released in 1995, the development team was credited with establishing 3D car combat in next generation videogaming. Twisted Metal 2 was released to critical claim in 1997 and remains one of the best-selling games of all time, with more than 1.9 million units sold in North America to date. Overall, the Twisted Metal franchise has sold close to five million units in North America, making it the best-selling car combat series ever.

‘‘Back in 1995, we introduced PlayStation fans to a new genre in gaming with Twisted Metal; now in 2001, we plan to redefine it with Twisted Metal:Black," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. ‘‘With the creative minds of the original Twisted Metal team and the advanced technological capabilities of the PlayStation 2, gamers will experience a familiar franchise with a whole new look and feel that provides a deeper and darker reality than ever before."

‘‘With the technological advancement of the PlayStation 2, art direction has become an integral part of the video game development process, just as it is in the movies," said Dave Jaffe, director and lead designer, Sony Computer Entertainment, Santa Monica. ‘‘With Twisted Metal:Black, we were finally able to implement all of the creative ideas we had envisioned for the first two games. The result is a darkly atmospheric, profound and strategic game, which is also easy for gamers to get into and lots of fun to play."

Built upon a world laced with madness and destruction, Twisted Metal:Black sets the stage for a gruesome, yet electrifying battle. Calypso, the mastermind behind the Twisted Metal battles, returns once more to host the ultimate contest of wreckage and devastation. He has plucked some prime contestants straight out of an asylum and has promised these otherwise doomed souls a single wish should they defeat their opponents in a battle of twisted metal. As the carnage unfolds, learn how and why these mad motorists were locked up behind the walls of insanity. Slip into their minds, take a walk around their mental anguish and come out screaming for more.

Through the technological capabilities of PlayStation 2, Twisted Metal:Black features enhanced player environments with moving traffic, changing weather conditions, living pedestrians and interactive objects, making for a highly-charged, living world of destruction. Destruction is at the game’s core, but deadly strategy is essential for creative kills, made possible by the many different weapons and combo attacks in Twisted Metal:Black. Get ready to rip through the foreboding battlegrounds and nightmarish landscapes in a wickedly dark world that is sure to bring out the madness in everyone.

Key features in Twisted Metal:Black:

* Created by the original designer and developer of the Twisted Metal and Twisted Metal 2 games
* More than 18 death-match battlegrounds allow you to torture and humiliate your friends

-- Eleven vicious battlegrounds for the single-player to tear up

-- 14 diabolically inventive vehicles

* Twisted Metal:Black requires more skill than ever before; master strategic kills and then rejoice in victory
* Tons of weapons and combo attacks make for more creative kills
* Enhanced player environments with moving traffic, changing weather, living pedestrians and interactive objects make for a highly charged, living world of destruction
* Improved vehicle physics with dramatic jump and landing physics, more exaggerated powerslides and more responsive turn rates
* Variety of gameplay types, including Death Match, Mode, Endurance Mode and Co-op Mode, provide added replay value
* The entire game, including multi-player levels, runs at an impressive 60 frames per second
* Control precision has been perfected with the analog control ‘‘D" Pad.
* The independent Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) has rated Twisted Metal:Black ‘‘M" for Mature.

EA Ships NBA Street for the PlayStation 2

Electronic Arts announced it is shipping NBA Street for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system, the second title to be released under the EA SPORTS BIG brand. NBA Street allows players to take basketball back to its roots on blacktop courts throughout North America, while facing off against the best the NBA has to offer and the EA SPORTS BIG Street Legends. First team to ‘‘21" wins, but in NBA Street style and attitude are as

important as putting the ball in the basket.

"When we embarked on making NBA Street more than a year ago our goal was to capture the attitude and culture of streetball, while at the same time making a unique and fun game for everyone, not just basketball fans,‘‘ said producer Wil Mozell. "We focused on making the entire game a fun experience, where defense is as fun to play as offense. We feel like we accomplished this and that players will feel the same way.‘‘

NBA Street features two gameplay modes, City Circuit and Hold the Court. City Circuit challenges players to battle the best of ‘‘The Street" in a unique level-based challenge. Win, and players can add a team member from the defeated team to their own. This is important when taking on the dominating level bosses: the Street Legends. Beat the Street Legends and players will add them, as well as their home court, to their squad. Even with Michael Jordan as a teammate, beating the Legends on their respective home courts is a challenge. Hold the Court mode challenges players pick a court and try to win a set number of consecutive games against mixed squads of NBA players. Game players can win accessories ranging from shoes to points for creating one’s own male or female street legend.

In NBA Street the rules are loosened up allowing for goaltending, and without refs to call fouls offensive players must get creative to score. Players can snatch a ball from midair or initiate body contact on the shooter during a shot and not worry about a whistle being blown, making defense and offense equally as fun.

The animations and movements in NBA Street use motion capture performed by some of the best streetballers in the country and are based on real-life physics, but are pumped up for over the top arcade-action. Amazing dunks, high-flying rejections, hard-hitting collisions and street dribbling moves like ‘‘Dinner’s Served" and ‘‘Off the Chain" are just a few highlights NBA Street delivers.

Choose to play 12 of the most intricate courts ever seen in a console basketball game. From the rooftops of downtown Los Angeles, to the snowy streets of Boston, to Rucker Park in New York City, these are the toughest and hippest courts in the country.

Up and coming pop group 3LW contributed their voices to announce different dunks and trick moves in NBA Street and show off their skills on the blacktop as an unlockable team. Complimenting 3LW’s commentary is NBA Street court announcer, Joe ‘‘The Show" Jackson, a character who doesn’t mince words while he analyzes the in-game action. Funky beats from the out of this world DJ crew, Ninja Tune, add further flavor to the streetballers moves on the asphalt.

NBA Street is rated ‘‘E" (Everyone) by the ESRB. NBA Street is analog controller compatible and supports one or two players.

Tang Tang is Set to Puzzle the Masses This August

Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. makes its Nintendo Game Boy Advance debut with a challenging and captivating puzzle game entitled Tang Tang.

Developed by GameVision Inc., Tang Tang will be published by Take-Two Interactive, Inc. and is scheduled to be released in August 2001.

‘‘Take-Two is delighted to join the excitement surrounding Game Boy Advance," stated Kelly Sumner, Chief Executive Officer of Take-Two Interactive. ‘‘The Game Boy Advance had an extremely successful launch and we expect its impressive sales to continue. We intend to launch a number of new titles which we expect to build upon our already impressive publishing line-up for the other platforms."

Tang Tang is the Company’s first product to be released for the Game Boy Advance and will be followed up with a title based on the highly successful Duke Nukem franchise to be released in the fall of 2001.

Tang Tang is a highly addictive puzzle game where the player must strategically create a path of blocks to clear the stage of Energy Crystals and find the exit. As one of four super-dimensional cyborg heroes, these brave soldiers must use their cunning, quick reflexes and Power Bolts to save their galaxy.

Midway Games Discontinues Coin-Operated Videogames Business to Focus Exclusively On Rapidly Growing Home Videogame Market

Midway Games Inc. announced that in light of ongoing declining demand in the coin-operated arcade videogame market, it is discontinuing its coin-operated videogames business. Midway’s game development efforts are now focused exclusively on games for next-generation home videogame platforms, including the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system, the Xbox videogame system from Microsoft and the Nintendo GameCube and Game Boy Advance.

The Company expects the elimination of its coin-operated games business to result in a reduction in work force of fewer than 60 employees, and a primarily non-cash pretax charge of less than $8 million in the quarter ending June 30, 2001.

As previously announced, the Company implemented a strategy to focus its product development resources on next-generation home videogame consoles, which are expected to generate significant demand for game software over the next several years. As a result of this strategy, Midway is expecting to generate significant revenue and profit growth in fiscal 2002, which commences January 1, 2002.

Sony to Distribute Sega Games in Europe

Sony Corp will handle the European distribution of games designed by Japanese videogame software maker Sega Corp for PlayStation 2, Sega said on Wednesday, reflecting Sega’s efforts to bolster ties with former rivals.

Under the agreement, the European unit of Sony Computer Entertainment, Sony’s gaming arm -- once one of Sega’s rivals in the game hardware battle -- will manufacture, distribute and market the games in five European languages.

Sega has been intensifying efforts to expand global software sales after

its high-profile exit from the unprofitable Dreamcast game console business earlier this year.

Sega is currently developing seven game titles including a new version of its blockbuster Virtua Fighter series for PlayStation 2, a Sega spokesman said, adding that at least two of these titles will be released before Christmas.

‘‘Since we do not have our own marketing network in Europe, we decided to have SCE to handle distribution of our games for PlayStation 2," he said.

Sega’s game software for Dreamcast will continue to be handled by a European distributor, he added.

Sega, known for its ‘‘Sonic The Hedgehog" game character, and the world’s leading home videogame console maker, Sony, have recently been working closely as part of Sega’s broad partner-making efforts after a painful exit from Dreamcast.

Earlier this month, the two companies said they plan to enable users of their consoles to play videogames via the Internet.

In February, they, together with Japanese game software maker Namco Ltd, announced a collaboration on game distribution via high-capacity broadband networks to arcade game centers.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Congress Renews Net Tax Debate

As an October deadline approaches, talk of an Internet sales tax is once again simmering on Capitol Hill.

Bills being kicked around the Senate are pitting the interests of local governments and retailers against those who want the Internet to be a permanently tax-free zone.

In October, a moratorium on new Web sales taxes expires. If the moratorium terminates without new regulations to replace it, states, cities and other local entities will be free to add their own tariffs on Web transactions. The temporary tax ban, which first went into effect in 1998, provided a three-year period to study the issue.

But even the members of the official committee charged with studying Web taxation couldn’t reach a formal agreement to submit to Congress last year, illustrating how divisive the issue can be. The Advisory Commission on Electronic Commerce disbanded last spring without the two-thirds vote necessary for an official recommendation to federal lawmakers.

Lobbyists say they don’t think the issue will be resolved quickly this time, either. Many say they believe some sort of Internet taxation bill will pass eventually, partly because of the deadline and also because no lawmaker wants to run for re-election next year as the candidate who taxed the Internet. On the other hand, the dot-com bust has caused many e-tailers to close shop, meaning legislators might not be as eager to address Internet-related issues as they have been in the past.

Regardless, the shape of the tax legislation is still undetermined.

The latest talks could lead to a compromise measure that may be introduced as early as next week, according to the National Governors Association, which has fought measures to permanently ban sales taxes. The compromise bill would extend the moratorium and require at least 25 states to submit a unified plan to Congress that would outline how they planned to simplify the process of potentially taxing Internet transactions.

However, during the compromise talks, lawmakers apparently have removed a description of the exact steps the states are required to take to prove they’re simplifying the process.

"I’m a little worried," said Frank Shafroth, director of state federal relations for the National Governors Association. "It’s sort of like being blindfolded. By doing this, they’ve left open a big way for Congress to say, ’Oh no, that’s not what we meant by simplification.’"

One of the biggest complaints of local entities is not that they can’t add taxes to Web transactions, but that mechanisms to collect current taxes are difficult. The groups are hoping that a compromise bill would include provisions that would make it easier for them to collect any taxes currently charged.

A spokesman for Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., a sponsor of one of the major tax bills, said negotiations on a final compromise version, which would cull from Dorgan’s bill and others, are "getting close but not there yet." The spokesman said hearings on the issue could begin soon. He also said that Fritz Hollings, D-S.C., the new chairman of the Commerce Committee, which is considering some of the bills, has indicated that he expects to mark up a compromise measure within the month.

Coy Knobel, a spokesman for Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., who’s co-sponsoring Dorgan’s bill, said the change in leadership has sparked renewed interest in the legislation.

USA Today reported last week that a compromise had been reached that would lengthen the moratorium to 2006 but allow local governments to collect taxes; however, staffers disagreed with the report.

"We’re still trying to get the different interested parties together," Knobel said. "We’re working hard to get some sort of compromise that’s acceptable to different people."

Knobel said that the senator has spoken with the vice president about the issue but the White House has not taken an official position.

Dorgan’s own proposal would extend the moratorium for another four years to give states the chance to simplify their tax schemes by following a series of specific steps. The measure is backed by brick-and-mortar retailers, which worry that e-tailers would have an advantage in a tax-free world. Other supporters include groups representing local

governments, which fear losing revenue as more transactions are done online. The bill has 10 sponsors

Meanwhile, Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., is sponsoring a competing bill that would extend the moratorium for five years and permanently ban any Internet access taxes. His bill is backed by e-commerce companies, which want to avoid additional taxes tacked on by local governments. His bill also would eliminate a grandfather clause that allows the handful of governments currently applying taxes to continue to do so.

Another bill would extend the moratorium permanently.

Similar bills are moving through the House. But some lobbyists don't think anything will happen this session.

"There are some bigger things that are happening that are much more important to the broader American constituency," said Ben Isaacson, executive director of the Association for Interactive Media, which has opposed Internet taxes.

He said legislators are more concerned with the education bill and other issues. In addition, he said the negotiations on Internet taxes could drag out as special interest groups try to tack on pet projects onto the measure, much as they do with appropriations bills that must pass by certain deadline.

House Leader Says Will Block Online Sales Tax

House Majority Leader Dick Armey said on Wednesday he would seek a short-term ban on Internet sales taxes, throwing up a potential roadblock to states and municipalities that want to tax online commerce.

Speaking at an event outlining the House Republicans' high-tech agenda, Armey said he hoped to include a three-to-five-year ban on Internet sales taxes in legislation that would make permanent the current ban on access taxes and other Internet-specific taxes that expires in October.

But Armey said he would not seek a permanent ban.

‘‘We would only get a short-term limit on that," he said.

Armey's proposal could throw a wrench into state efforts to tax online commerce.

Under a 1992 Supreme Court decision, states cannot require retailers to collect sales taxes unless they have a physical presence in that state.

Many states are worried their revenues could shrink as more Americans shop on the Internet, while online retailers say they could not possibly comply with thousands of varying local tax codes.

A University of Tennessee study predicts that states could lose $20 billion annually from uncollected e-commerce sales taxes absent legal changes.

An effort currently underway in at least 29 states aims to streamline and simplify local tax codes so they could eventually collect taxes on e-commerce.

Two competing proposals in the Senate would make it easier for states to tax online sales once at least 25 of them simplify their tax codes. Compromise legislation could be introduced as early as this week, and backers say chances for passage in the Democratic-controlled Senate are good.

But the effort could face a tougher slog in the Republican-controlled House, where leaders outlined a high-tech agenda that placed a high priority on tax reduction and deregulation.

Any bill that clears the House would probably closely resemble the current ban on access and discriminatory taxes passed in 1998, said Armey spokesman Richard Diamond.

‘‘I don’t think the language is going to be different from the last," Diamond said. ‘‘I don’t think it needs to be."

Diamond said the House would not need to include a specific proposal to ban online sales taxes in any Internet tax bill, as states are already unable to collect sales taxes on online purchases unless Congress were to specifically permit it.

Key Senators Slam House Broadband Measure

Two key senators on Tuesday slammed pending legislation that would do away with requirements that local telephone giants open their networks before they can offer long-distance data service, likely dooming chances of the measure becoming law this year.

The dominant local phone companies like Verizon Communications and BellSouth Corp., the so-called baby Bells created from the 1984 break-up of AT&T, must first prove to regulators their local networks are open to rivals before they can offer the lucrative long-haul services.

The legislation, sponsored by Reps. Billy Tauzin, a Louisiana Republican, and John Dingell, a Democrat from Michigan, would reverse that for data services and is awaiting consideration by the full U.S. House. It narrowly passed one House panel and received an unfavorable opinion from a second.

‘‘The fact is that Congress should not help the Bells extend their monopolies" to high-speed Internet access, Sen. Ernest Hollings, chairman of Senate Commerce Committee said during a hearing on local telephone competition.

‘‘The Bells must compete like everyone else to get customers in these markets and not look for a government handout," the South Carolina Democrat said.

That sentiment was shared by Sen. John McCain, the ranking Republican on the panel, and several other lawmakers who were concerned that not enough competition is thriving, particularly in rural areas and prices for consumers are rising instead of falling.

‘‘These price increases are caused by several factors, but the most important of these is doubtless a lack of competition between various types of service providers," McCain said.

‘‘This committee needs to probe behind the rhetoric of the parties to discover a solution designed not to favor or punish particular industry sectors," the Arizona Republican said.

Without support of the top two members of the panel, it will be difficult for the measure to be brought before the Senate. A Federal Communications Commission report said about 8 percent of the nation’s local telephone lines were served by competitors to the four baby Bells at the end of last year.

‘‘I don’t think it’s got a chance in the Senate," AT&T Chairman Michael Armstrong told reporters. ‘‘I think it’s bad policy, it’s a bad law and I think it has a bad outcome for American consumers."

Still, the sole representative of the Bells heard by the committee, Margaret Greene of BellSouth, said there was competition thriving and there was a need for incentives to rollout high-speed Internet service in rural areas.

‘‘Competition will go where the money is," she told the panel. Rivals refuse to go after the residential customer because there is little or no profit margin, she said.

‘‘Incentives like tax credits put the correct incentive in place" for encouraging deployment in rural areas, she said.

The Tauzin-Dingell measure would also limit what network elements the locals must make available to rivals but would force them to deploy high-speed Internet service in rural and hard-to-reach areas.

The second-largest local phone company expressed some optimism that the bill may have a chance in the Senate because of comments made during the hearing by Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott who noted that the 1996 Telecom Act may need to be amended.

‘‘That’s a very strong sign and a number of senators mentioned today how important it is to get deployment of high speed Internet in rural America and that’s something Tauzin-Dingell does," said John Emra, a spokesman for SBC Communications Inc.

‘‘The signs for Tauzin-Dingell out of today’s hearing are very good," he said.

States Issue Warning To Microsoft

Two attorneys general express ’serious concerns’ about Microsoft’s ’very troubling’ strategy for its Windows XP operating system.

Two of the state attorneys general who spearheaded the antitrust case against Microsoft say the software giant "may be repeating its efforts to maintain and extend its monopoly" by bundling features into its newest operating system.

Attorneys General Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and Tom Miller of Iowa issued a terse news release Wednesday afternoon saying they have "serious concerns" about Microsoft’s "very troubling" strategy for its Windows XP

operating system, which will debut in the fall.

Their statements accompany mounting complaints from antitrust experts that the Redmond, Wash.-based software giant is still using the type of monopolistic business tactics that sparked the original antitrust case, currently under review by the U.S. District Court of Appeals, which is expected to rule soon.

Microsoft's decision to bundle Internet Explorer into the operating system was the foundation for the antitrust case now under appeal. The attorneys general for 19 states and the Justice Department sued the company in 1998 alleging it used its monopoly in the operating system market to capture the Net browser market.

Critics say the company is reverting to old tactics by loading Windows XP with features such as instant messaging and Smart Tags, which gives Microsoft some greater control over consumers' Internet use. Windows is the operating system on roughly 92 percent of all personal computers around the world.

"Microsoft is a more powerful monopoly then ever before they have three separate monopolies," said Mike Pettit, president of ProComp, an organization backed by Microsoft rivals Oracle, Sun Microsystems, America Online and others. ProComp leaders discussed Microsoft on Wednesday at the annual summer meeting of state attorneys general in Vermont.

"We were just explaining to them the way Microsoft is using its multiple monopolies, which are interlocked, both to protect those monopolies and expand them and, ultimately, to control the Internet," Pettit said.

Blumenthal and Miller dismissed a report published earlier Wednesday by The Associated Press saying the pair is preparing to file a second antitrust lawsuit against the software giant.

"We have no current plans for a second lawsuit," Blumenthal and Miller said in the statement. "We would never completely rule out a new suit, but our focus now is on the antitrust case that already is before the courts."

Microsoft dismissed the attorneys' general concerns, noting that the newest operating system was designed to "deliver the best experience to users," not necessarily to force out rivals.

"It is unfortunate our competitors continue to spread misinformation about Microsoft's products," said Microsoft spokesman Jim Cullinan. "That seems to be their only strategy, to invest in lobbying regulators rather than innovating and improving their products."

Attorneys and antitrust experts speculated that the statements from Blumenthal and Miller are meant to send a message to the Bush administration.

"There's a great deal of consternation among the attorney general ranks as to whether the new administration will support the current case," said Daniel M. Wall, chair of the antitrust department of San Francisco-based law firm Latham & Watkins. "By saying that they're going to bring an action for a similar practice is sort of a way of saying that they remain committed to the original case and that come what may, they're going to keep pursuing the original case."

Many observers expect the new administration to be easy on Microsoft after

the appeals decision is issued, possibly allowing a settlement that leaves the company in one piece.

Last June, U.S. District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson ordered that Microsoft be split into two separate companies, one specializing in software and Web products -- such as Outlook, Internet Explorer, BackOffice and the Microsoft Network --and another specializing in operating systems.

The U.S. District Court of Appeals is reviewing Jackson’s decision and is widely expected to roll back many of his harsher penalties.

"They’re implicitly saying they’re probably going to lose," economics professor Stanley J. Liebowitz said of the anti-Microsoft statements issued Wednesday by Blumenthal and Miller. "They don’t think there’s a chance in hell Judge Jackson’s decision’s going to stand, because if it were they wouldn’t have to do this because Microsoft would be split."

Liebowitz, who teaches at the University of Texas at Dallas and is co-author of "Winners, Losers, and Microsoft: Competition and Antitrust in High Technology," said the statements were a last-minute effort to build momentum for a cause that many people think is lost.

"Let’s say you’ve got a prisoner who’s facing the death penalty and then an attorney brings up another charge against the criminal," Liebowitz said. "Why would you bring up another charge if you think the guy’s going to be put to death? There are people in Washington talking about just throwing out the (Microsoft) case. That’s got to be pretty scary for the attorneys general."

Those in favor of breaking up Microsoft have become especially concerned about a pro-Microsoft appeals decision in recent weeks as Microsoft executives have boosted their lobbying forces and forged alliances in Washington, D.C.

Last month, two lobbying groups unveiled studies claiming that Microsoft has not stifled competition. The report from The Association for Competitive Technology and the Computing Technology Industry Association was a rebuttal of criticism from Microsoft rivals Oracle and Sun Microsystems, which charged that XP Microsoft.Net Web services strategy would force its technologies on Internet users.

Meanwhile, Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer paid a "courtesy call" Tuesday to Vice President Dick Cheney to discuss a range of issues but did not bring up the imminent appellate ruling.

Ballmer is visiting the nation’s capital for two days of meetings with members of Congress and major customers, said Microsoft spokeswoman Ginny Terzano. On Wednesday morning Ballmer addressed a work force summit hosted by the Department of Labor, speaking primarily about Microsoft’s efforts to prepare workers for the high-tech work environment.

Others dismiss the statements by the attorneys general as little more than political posturing.

"My initial reaction is, are these guys running for reelection?" said Luke M. Froeb, associate professor of management and former economist to the antitrust division of the Justice Department. "It could be a bunch of free publicity."

100GB Hard Drive Hits Storage High

Maxtor has spun out a 100GB hard drive aimed at a small but growing audience of audio and video fanatics.

The $300 DiamondMax D536X, released Monday, is the latest high water mark for an industry in which technology is butting heads with the laws of physics.

"This business is a constant challenge to increase capacity to meet emerging demand," Maxtor spokesman Martin Parry said. "It’s a relentless cycle."

For several years, hard drive manufacturers have been dramatically increasing capacity in an attempt to outdo one other. The current industry sweet spot is 20GB to 40GB drives, but Parry said the sales prospects for 100GB drives look very good.

"As long as there is capacity, people will always find a way to fill it," Parry said.

Until now, the highest capacity drives reached 80GB. On Monday, Milpitas, Calif.-based Maxtor also released the $229 DiamondMax D540X, an 80GB drive.

Maxtor’s target audience for the 100GB drives are people who want to download and save massive numbers of digital-audio files and digital images. The 100GB drive can hold 100 hours of compressed digital video or up to 25,000 four-minute digital-audio files, according to Maxtor.

IDC analyst Dave Reinsel agreed that there are always people who can fill up any drive and that the group is growing, but he asserts it isn’t likely that mainstream PC buyers will need that much room for storage.

However, Parry asserts that, for $300, the excess capacity may be worth it to consumers anyway.

The price of storage capacity, which continues to fall, has some analysts wondering whether hard drives are becoming commodity items.

"There’s probably more technology in a hard drive than in (the rest of) an entire PC when you consider the heads and the platters and everything," Parry responded. "We’re hardly looking at pork bellies here."

The new 100GB drives are a 25 percent boost over the former highest capacity, 80GB. The 25 percent increase is modest compared to the average 50 percent increases that the industry has managed to make over the last couple years.

More moderate capacity increases may be a future trend as drive manufacturers get closer to the physical limits of the hardware in its current form.

The limit to capacity is expected to be around 137GB, which Reinsel expects will be reached as early as this year.

Maxtor expects to exceed that limit through technical advances, Parry

said. He would not elaborate.

Last month, IBM announced innovations that it expects will allow hard drive manufacturers eventually to reach 400GB.

Apple Releases Mac OS X 10.0.4

Apple has released its much-anticipated update for Mac OS X. Although rumored by many to be called OS X 10.0.5, Apple has kept the numbering order of the updates in tact with this release.

According to the information included with the update, Mac OS X 10.0.4 delivers a significant number of improvements for USB devices, including additional external device support for iTunes burning; improved battery life for many PowerBook G3 systems; and Classic compatibility improvements.

This update provides the latest security updates to OpenSSH and "sudo" services. Also provided is support for Apple’s newest 17-inch flat-panel display.

You can download the update through the Software Update Control Panel in Mac OS X.

Tool Feeds Ads To Your E-mails

Melbourne-based online marketing company, Reva Networks, is currently promoting a new e-mail technology--Admail--that allows online advertisers to intercept e-mail messages as they enter the mail server and "wrap" them in advertising content tailored to the recipient’s demographic profile.

Unlike conventional unsoliciated e-mail, where advertising arrives in the users’ inbox as separate e-mail, Admail fuses advertising with the body message regardless of its origin.

Robert Pickup, Revo Networks CEO, says the company’s partners and customers include both conventional ISP-based POP e-mail services and free Web-based email services that generate revenue through advertising. "We’re in discussions with many ISPs and advertisers," he said. "It’s fair to say that interest has been very strong."

Pickup says that Admail has proven itself to be more effective than other forms of online advertising.

"Because the advertising is embedded within a regular e-mail and not a separate e-mail message from an advertiser, users are more likely to open the message and hence be exposed to the advertising offer," he said.

Even though the advertising content may hitch a ride with mail traffic generated by paying subscribers they’re not assured of having the choice to filter the additional content. "That is up to the ISP or the partner but an opt-out function is likely to be provided in that case," said Pickup.

David Bather, Public Relations manager for Ozemail, warns that online

marketers need to be highly circumspect about the privacy concerns of the consumer with e-mail-based strategies. Reflecting on the ISP’s experience in the field he said, we’ve always been very aware of the rights of the consumer. Something like this would have to be scrutinised very carefully. I think it’s important to give consumers an opt-out function."

Charles Britton, IT policy officer for the Australian Consumer Association, is critical of any electronic advertising that places consumers in a reactive position. "We’d rather see an opt-in than an opt-out" he said, speaking on behalf of the association.

Pickup doesn’t believe that consumer ire will hinder the success of the technology. According to the company’s research, consumers aren’t angered by e-mail advertising "as long as its relevant to them." Referring to results of early trials of the technology, which did not provoke any feedback from e-mail users," he said. "It’s obviously not upsetting people in any way."

Britton doesn’t believe that consumers will passively accept the new form of online advertising. "Without some incentive why would you want advertising in your e-mail?" he said.

Observing the negative reception that spam receives from the Internet community, Britton believes that advertisers may ultimately decide the fate of the technology. "Advertisers are reluctant to be associated with anything that irritates consumers," he said. "There’s not many successful business models based on annoying people."

Judge Won’t Dismiss Aimster Lawsuit

A federal judge refused to throw out a copyright infringement suit against the major record companies filed by file-sharing computer service Aimster.

U.S. District Judge Lawrence Kahn denied a motion by the Recording Industry Association of America and 17 companies to dismiss Aimster’s lawsuit. He also refused to transfer it to Manhattan, where 36 companies filed two subsequent copyright-infringement suits against the computer service.

Aimster is seeking a declaratory judgment that it does not violate recording copyrights.

‘‘Everybody we’ve named in Albany either has sued us or said they’re going to sue us," said Aimster attorney George Carpinello. He plans to file motions in to have all the cases consolidated in Albany.

‘‘This is all procedural maneuvering," said Matt Oppenheim, RIAA vice president for legal affairs. ‘‘The court has not ruled on the merits in any way. We’re confident that when the court does rule on the merits, the rights of copyright owners will be upheld."

Aimster, which lets users exchange files via instant messages on their ‘‘buddy lists," says its system simply provides private channels of communication and does not monitor or control what users send each other.

Its virtual private networks are different from the Web-wide approach to file sharing that landed Napster in court, but recording industry officials say both services allow for searches for copyrighted music.

Aimster users also can share any type of file, not just MP3s, the popular digital music file format.

In denying the motion to dismiss, Kahn ruled Aimster did not bring its lawsuit simply to head off the companies' lawsuits, but for the very reason the Declaratory Judgment Act was created: To ''enable a party who is challenged, or endangered in its enjoyment of what he claims to be his rights, to initiate the proceedings against his tormentor and remove the cloud by an authoritative determination of plaintiff's legal right ..."

Abovepeer Inc., which owns Aimster, sued first on April 30 in Albany after receiving a warning letter from RIAA threatening ''additional legal remedies."

On May 24, major recording companies also sued, claiming Aimster's parent company is helping customers infringe upon the copyrights of millions of sound recordings throughout the world.

The 17 record company defendants include Arista Records Inc., Sony Music Entertainment Inc., Capitol Records Inc. and Atlantic Recording Corp.

eBay "Recommendations" Upset Members

A new eBay service that automatically sends e-mail to losing bidders alerting them to similar items for sale has upset sellers who say it interferes with their business.

"This goes beyond protecting eBay's revenue or enforcing eBay's rules. This goes into stealing money from my pocket," said Bob Miller, a top seller on eBay who deals in stamps and postcards.

eBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove acknowledged that while some members are upset, bidders can opt out of getting the e-mails. Plus, eBay sent out a survey about the new policy to some 20,000 of its 30 million registered members, Pursglove said. Of the 4,000 who responded, 80 percent supported it.

The e-mail recommends items elsewhere on the site that are similar to the one a bidder lost on--something like Amazon's "suggestions" for future purchases that are based on a person's previous purchases. Such personalization efforts have long been considered a key element in successful e-commerce strategy.

But some eBay sellers argue that the e-mail just siphons off their customers and directs them to competitors.

Plus, it means eBay is now doing exactly what it forbids its sellers to do: contact losing bidders to offer them similar items.

Late last year, eBay cracked down on sellers who contacted losing bidders. Although an offline deal means eBay loses a transaction fee, the company said it cracked down because the offline deals were a "leading cause" of fraud. Earlier this year, eBay went further, changing the e-mail system to restrict access to members' e-mail addresses and block other sellers from seeing the e-mail addresses of competitors' bidders.

The move is mirrored elsewhere on the web, where surviving dot-coms are now in a position to be more demanding of their now captive audience. In a drive to make money on the Internet, many sites are now charging for once-free content, or using aggressive advertising such as pop-up ads, even though readers complain.

In the auction community, eBay has emerged as the unquestioned leader and some members say they have long felt at odds with the San Jose-based company. Many members are mom-and-pop sellers who have given up working in the offline world and depend on eBay sales for their livelihoods. As such, they have often been upset by changes they see as detrimental to their business.

Bobby Beeman, a Dallas-based seller who doesn't like the new service, says eBay's changing rules makes it tough on sellers, who have already had to adjust to increased competition and falling prices on the site.

"Reacting to the market is a normal thing that a seller has to do...reacting to eBay is something that only eBay sellers have to do," Beeman said.

"I can keep adapting and keep changing, but I would like to find something that I can depend on a little bit more than eBay because I feel like I can only depend on eBay from week to week because of all the changes they are making."

Among the other problems eBay members have faced include outages, special fees and more recently, the discontinuance of listing software many sellers had purchased.

Bidders are upset by the new service too, said Rosalinda Baldwin, editor of The Auction Guild, an online newsletter for the Internet auctions community.

"Bidders hate this because it's spam," said Baldwin. Plus, many bidders complained to her that the "recommendations" were far off the mark.

Ross Wright, who sells artwork and music-related items on eBay, said the new policy hurts the very sellers who bring bidders to the site.

"(You) don't stick a Wal-Mart flier in with a JC Penney flier--the mall doesn't do that. It's not a sound business practice," Wright said.

To protest the new policy, which began earlier this month, Miller tried to auction off a special eBay jacket he received for having one of the highest feedback ratings. The auction included sarcastic comments about the new "recommendation" service: "Should you be outbid, we will inundate you with unsolicited commercial e-mail (a.k.a. spam) recommending that you go elsewhere and bid on something else we, in our infinite wisdom, think you want."

More than 150 supporters bid it up to $43 million before eBay shut down the auction one day later.

His protest resulted in several other auction sites courting Miller to move his auctions over from eBay--something that hasn't worked out for him in the past.

"Not a single one of us really wants to leave," Miller said. "We just want eBay to pay attention to us, to give us a little bit.

"You raised fees, fine. You're changing things left and right, fine. But don't steal from us."

eBay To Sellers: Tell Us More

The San Jose, Calif.-based online auction company announced on Monday that it will unveil a series of modifications to the system over the next several quarters. The first changes, which the company will unveil over the next several weeks, should help make the feedback system easier to use, said eBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove.

Among the immediate changes: eBay will separate buyer and seller feedback and will provide a link to feedback that a member has left for other buyers and sellers. The company plans to deal with questions of retaliatory feedback and more difficult issues related to the system later this year.

"These were clearly at the high end of a list of concerns and were ones on which we could develop solid consensus on how to address the issue," Pursglove said.

In a post on its announcement board, eBay said the changes follow a series of discussions with members about its feedback system.

"We garner input from our users before making changes to the Feedback Forum and are very careful about instituting changes that impact the feedback system," the company said in its note. "We believe this joint effort will set a good foundation for the success of the Feedback Forum in the future."

The feedback system allows members to get a sense of the trustworthiness of other members. In addition to providing the written comments of members, eBay assigns a feedback rating based on the number of positive comments a member received minus the number of negative comments. Recently the company honored the first 64 members who reached 10,000 or more feedback points.

Although the system forms the bedrock for trust and trading at eBay, it is not without its flaws. Some members have complained, for instance, that the system discourages negative comments because members fear receiving negative feedback in return.

Others have criticized the current system because it doesn't distinguish when a member participated in a transaction as a buyer and when they participated as a seller. Just because someone is a good buyer on eBay doesn't mean they will be a good seller and vice versa, some have argued.

More dangerously, some unscrupulous sellers have manipulated the system by leaving positive feedback for themselves through multiple user IDs. After building up their feedback rating--and the trust of other members--these sellers have bilked bidders through fraudulent auctions.

Late last year, two eBay sellers were indicted for defrauding bidders out of thousands of dollars worth of merchandise. At least one of the sellers was suspected of manipulating his feedback through bogus transactions and multiple IDs.

The changes to the feedback system appear to address some of these concerns.

As part of the changes, members will be able to update their feedback comments before the recipient can respond. eBay is also considering allowing members to edit their own comments before they are posted and is taking steps to remove unjustified feedback. Currently, members' comments are posted immediately, and eBay generally does not remove them.

eBay has tinkered with the feedback system before. Last year, the company began to require all feedback messages to be related to transactions on the site. When it made the change, the company revised members' feedback ratings, changing all comments not related to transactions to a neutral rating, which does not affect members' feedback numbers.

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